

WHAT TO EXPECT at the PAROLE HEARING



**Board of Probation & Parole
and
Department of Correction**

VICTIM SERVICES

Introduction

Whether you oppose or support an inmate's early release from prison, the Parole Hearing process can be a source of enormous anxiety and stress. Our goal is to give you as much information as possible to reduce those feelings on the day of the Parole hearing. We recognize that victims and/or their family members often don't know the questions to ask. Our hope is that this information will give you perspective and help clarify any uncertainties that you may have. The Victim Services Liaison for the Board of Probation and Parole and the Victim Services Director for the TN Department of Correction are available to answer any questions you may have after reading this booklet. You can also learn more by accessing the agencies' websites.

Cindy Jenkins
Victim Liaison
Board of Probation and Parole
404 James Robertson Parkway, Suite 1300
Nashville, TN 37243-0850
Phone: (615)741-1150 **Fax:** (615) 741-5337
Email: victim.witness@state.tn.us
Website: www2.tennessee.gov/bopp/home.htm

Sheryl DeMott
Victim Services Director
Tennessee Department of Correction
320 Sixth Avenue North, Rachel Jackson Building
Nashville, TN 37243-0465
Phone: (615) 741-1000 *8145 **Fax:** (615) 741-1055
Email: sheryl.demott@state.tn.us
Website: www.tennessee.gov/correction

General Information

Parole hearings are a time when hearing official (s) for the Board of Probation and Parole listen to information provided by the offender and others supporting or opposing his or her release from prison. The initial parole hearing date is determined by law. If the parole is initially declined, subsequent parole hearings are scheduled within guidelines set at the discretion of the parole board. Parole hearings are generally held at the institution where the offender is housed.

At the Parole hearing, the offender is given an opportunity to tell his or her story of what led up to becoming incarcerated. Parole officials ask questions to get more information or to clarify information shared. Visitors who attend are given an opportunity to voice their opinion regarding the offender's being released on parole supervision. The number of board members who review a case is dependent upon the offender's convictions. Decisions ***are usually not made*** on the day of the Parole hearing. Board members strive to have their decision finalized within one month.

Parole Hearing Notification

By law, written notice of a pending parole hearing is mailed 30 days prior to the scheduled date to any person requesting notification of hearings with the State of Tennessee Board of Probation and Parole or the Department of Correction. The letter includes:

- The offender name and his prison (TOMIS ID) number
- The hearing location, date and time
- The name and contact information for the Institutional Probation Parole Officer (IPPO).

Victim Impact Role

Options for Victim Impact

Parole hearings are open to the public. Victims/victim families, or other persons opposing release on parole supervision can provide information regarding their opinion to the hearing officials. Each institution is assigned an Institutional Probation Parole Officer (IPPO), who can provide information and answer your questions *prior to* the hearing day. The person to contact is listed on the Notification of Parole Hearing letter. Available options include:

- ***Send in a Victim Impact Statement (VIS)***

A VIS is a written statement describing the continued impact of the crime that can be sent directly to the BOPP. Their address and fax number is included at the front of this form. The VIS is kept in the inmate's permanent file with the Board of Probation and Parole (BOPP) for review by the Parole officials prior to making a recommendation for decision. The statement is considered confidential and not read in the Parole Hearing.

- ***Send in a Petition***

A brief, written summary giving your reasons that the offender should not be released. Others in agreement also sign the form. No addresses or telephone numbers are required.

- ***Attend the parole hearing***

At the Institution

If you plan to attend and/or speak at the Parole Hearing, you can receive best information, preparation, and accommodation through the Institutional Probation Parole Officer (IPPO) assigned to that institution. It is *most important* that you let him or her know in advance that you plan to attend the hearing.

By Videoconference

Videoconference may allow for less travel to attend a hearing. You can participate in person without being at the prison. To learn more and to find out **whether** this option is **available** for use at the hearing you are interested in, contact the following person:

Board of Probation and Parole Videoconference Coordinator at:

(615) 741-1150

- ***Provide in-person hearing testimony***

If you choose, you may have a confidential conversation with a Probation Parole staff member. Some victims of felony crime are uncomfortable attending the hearing in the presence of the inmate. By special request, a victim may speak privately and confidentially with a Probation Parole staff member. This meeting must be held at least 14 days prior to the scheduled parole hearing. Although officials can also take confidential testimony during the parole hearing, they cannot insure that the inmate will be unaware of the person's presence. In either case, information remains confidential, except for court-ordered release. The Victim Liaison can help you arrange for a private session that best suits your needs.

- ***Record an audio Victim Impact Statement (cassette tape or CD)***

A cassette tape or CD can be submitted. Please use regular-sized cassette tapes only... NO mini tapes can be accommodated. Please include the offender name, TOMIS ID number, hearing location, hearing date, your name, and your relationship to the victim. The tape must arrive at the BOPP offices 14 days before the scheduled hearing. The BOPP Victim Liaison can answer additional questions regarding a cassette tape or CD.

- ***Record a Victim Impact Statement on Video***

This option can be used if you are located at least 200 miles from the hearing location, or if illness or work obligations prevent you from attending the hearing. Please include the offender name, TOMIS ID number, location, hearing date, your name, and relationship to the victim. The tape must arrive at the BOPP offices 14 days before the scheduled hearing. The BOPP Victim Liaison can answer additional questions regarding a video.

Preparing an impact statement

Impact Statements, whether written or read, most effectively present the victim's opinion when they contain the following information:

- A brief statement of the impact of the crime at the time it was committed.
- A brief description of the continuing impact of the crime on the victim's life *today*.
- A description of the continuing impact of the crime on victim family members and/or the community *today*.
- Keep spoken statements to five (5) minutes or less.

Attending a Parole Board Hearing

The institutional probation parole officer (IPPO) can best meet your needs by contacting him or her in advance if you plan to attend the Parole Hearing. Many times, several hearings are scheduled on the same day. Since persons supporting and opposing each hearing have opportunity to attend, prisons are accommodating many visitors. In addition, the IPPO is involved in each hearing and has very limited time to spend with you on parole hearing day.

Most hearings begin at 8:30 a.m.; those with visitors attending (opposition and/or support) are scheduled earliest, if possible. The DOC website (www.tennessee.gov/correction) has written directions to each prison. Go to "State Prisons" on the menu. When you click on the name of the prison, directions and other facility information will be available.

General Prison Procedures

Upon arriving at the prison facility, you may park in the visitor/employee lot. Unless you have been directed to another location by the IPPO, go to the Administration Building. You will be directed to a security checkpoint before proceeding into the prison facility. Checkpoint is operated by Department of Correction Officers. Officers will ask whether you are attending in "support" or "opposition" of the inmate's parole. Passing through checkpoint is similar to going through airport security:

- Walking through a metal detector
- Possibility of a personal search
- Your hand will be stamped to show at other checkpoints that you passed through security

General Prison Rules

General rules to allow visitors into the prison include:

Bring with you

- Only one key
- Current photo ID
- Notes to speak from

Do not bring on the prison grounds

- Knives, scissors, or other possible "weapons"
- Any alcoholic beverages or drugs

Leave (at home or in your vehicle)

- Your purse or wallet
- Gum, medicine, soft drinks, related items
- Cell phone

Wear modest clothing

- No open-toed shoes or sandals
- No sleeveless tops, midriffs, halter or tank tops or sundresses
- Do wear undergarments

Inside the Prison Compound

Since many parole hearings are held inside the prison compound, you can expect to see inmates. Prison personnel will accompany you to a waiting area near the room where parole hearings will be held. Sometimes the waiting area is in a separate room away from other visitors. There may be other victims/families waiting for a parole hearing in the room with you. If you have any needs while you wait please let the Correctional Officer know.

Parole Hearing Process

When it is time to hear your case, you will be accompanied into the parole hearing room. "Supporters" may already be seated; you will not be seated directly with them. The inmate may already be seated, or will be escorted into the room and seated in a chair a few feet away from you, facing the Parole Board. A Correctional Officer will be in the parole hearing room at all times.

The Parole Hearing official will make a few opening comments. The inmate will tell "his or her" side of the story, sometimes in graphic detail, possibly different than you heard in court. Remember, parole officials have case material, regardless of what they may address aloud. *Please, do NOT address the inmate, directly or with outbursts.* You or a chosen representative will also have opportunity to speak during the hearing.

Additional information that the inmate wants the Parole official to consider ranges from his or her social history, programs or classes attended to work history and documented behavior. Supporting persons who speak often are family members. Sometimes prison employees, community volunteers or employers who have worked with the inmate may speak in favor of his or her release on parole.

When the Parole Hearing official asks you to speak, you may read from your Victim Impact Statement, or speak generally about the continued impact of the crime on your life. *Again, please do NOT directly address the inmate with your comments.* Any questions or clarification sought should be addressed to the Parole hearing official.

The inmate will be given opportunity for brief final comments. These comments may include why he or she believes parole is appropriate for this case, or statements of regret or sorrow for the crime committed.

Recommendation Votes

Each Parole hearing official present at the hearing will verbalize a recommendation vote in favor or against releasing the offender on parole. *The final decision is rarely made at the hearing.* The hearing information is reviewed administratively by Board Members not present at the hearing, who can adopt, modify, or reject the recommendation. A final decision is made when the required number of Board member votes is reached. The number of Board Members who review the case is dependent on the offender's current conviction offense (s). If an offender is denied parole, he or she has 45 days to file an appeal seeking a review of the decision.

After the Parole Hearing is Completed

When the Parole Hearing is completed, the Parole Hearing Official will ask the Correctional Officer to accompany you and your party from the Parole Hearing Room. You can return to the Visitor's Waiting room where you may ask any remaining questions, or take a few moments to regain your composure. When you are ready to leave the prison facility, the Correctional Officer will accompany you to the parking area.

Follow up Information

Final decisions of the Parole Board can take about thirty (30) days. All persons registered with the State of Tennessee Board of Probation & Parole or the Department of Correction, requesting decision information, will receive written notification of the Parole Board's final decision. If the offender is declined parole, the voting Board Members will decide when a person will be heard again. If recommended for release on parole, the inmate's release plan (his proposed residence and employment) will be investigated, approved or denied by a Probation Parole Officer. Once the plan is approved, those who have requested notification of release on parole information will be notified.

Common Abbreviations and Terms

BOPP	Board of Probation & Parole
TDOC	Tennessee Department of Correction
CC	Community Corrections
IPPO	Institutional Probation Parole Office
RED	Release Eligibility Date. Date eligible to have first parole hearing/
SV	Safety Valve Date. An early release date where offenders with certain offenses can be heard earlier than the release eligibility date.
PP	Probationary Parole. Recommended under old law.
RR	Granted Parole. Offender is past his or her release eligibility date.
EF	Granted Parole on a future effective date, month and year. (Example: EF 8-9-04)
RD	Offender to be released on parole on Release Eligibility Date (RED)
DS	Declined parole. A future review month and year is given by the Parole Board Members.
BS	Declined Balance of Sentence. The offender will not be reviewed again by the Parole Board. Therefore, he or she will remain in prison until the sentence expires. The offender <u>will not be</u> on parole supervision.

Parole Board Members: Seven (7) individuals, including the Chairman, appointed by the Governor to serve six-year staggered terms. They are responsible for declining, granting and revoking the parole status of an offender. They also make recommendations to the Governor in clemency matters.

Hearing Officials: Includes the Board Members and Hearing Officers who are responsible for conducting parole hearings .

Mandatory Parole: Some sentences which occurred prior to 1982 required that an offender automatically be released on parole supervision 90 to 180 days prior to the expiration of his or her sentence. (This was determined by the length of the offender's sentence.)

Notes

Parole Hearing Time: _____ **Date:** _____

IPPO Name: _____

Contact info: _____

Inmate Name: _____

TOMIS ID: _____

Parole Hearing Institution: _____

Institution Address: _____

Additional Information or Questions



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